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Strengthening Teacher Education Program: Keys to Develop through Teacher Assessment

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Abstract

Teacher performance assessment is a part of a global trend based on teacher education program. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the American Teacher Performance Assessment (TPA) program, to identify some of the features in creating a system for pre-service teachers in developing countries, and to suggest an ideal TPA model for strengthening the teacher education program.

Keywords: *teacher education, TPA, curriculum design, teacher assessment, teaching performance*

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Introduction

One of the many challenges in teacher education in developing countries is the struggle in producing quality teachers. Due to the limited choice in the recruitment and the poor structure of the teacher training programs, teachers in developing countries graduated with mediocre skills in teaching and learning. The teaching sector is being de-professionalized and often overlooked although a lot of monies are spent in education. As a way to improve education in developing countries, there should be a shift in the current practices and the cycle of producing non-performing teachers should be stopped. Teacher training colleges should demand excellence from the student teachers and they should design a program that could successfully produce good teachers who are able to teach and perform in schools. A suggestion is to introduce a standardized teacher assessment among pre-service teachers. The standard teacher assessment could be a tool in governing the expected standards in teaching. Generally speaking, teacher assessment is conducted with the purpose of regulating the quality of teaching performance, promoting good teaching practices, increasing teachers' skills, and as a method of appraising teachers for promotion. While there are strict standard evaluations for teachers, student teachers are not held to the same standards as teachers. In establishing 'good teaching' habits, it is best if teacher candidates are held to a strong standard which ties in with accreditation. In the United States of America, the Teacher Performance Assessment (TPA) is the nationwide initiative to increase the quality of teachers in the certification programs. The TPA model has the potential of being applied to the context of teacher training in developing countries as a way of establishing a strong basis in teaching and learning. This paper will look at the TPA model and bring some of the features in creating a system for pre-service teachers in developing countries. Main text should be started from a new page after the Title and Abstract page.

The Teacher Performance Assessment Model (TPA)

Teachers are bound to certain standards that must be met in ensuring students' performance. One most common debate on teachers is 'Does teachers' poor performance affect students' achievement'? To many people, teachers are directly responsible for students' success and the failure of students reflects teachers' poor professional character and judgment. The discourse of blaming begins when teachers are seen as the problem. Teachers who do not perform are seen as incompetent, unprepared and not doing well in classrooms. As a way of getting rid of these so called 'bad apples', teaching assessment is introduced to evaluate teachers' performance. However, teaching assessment is not only introduced to assist teachers become better at their job but in the most part this has to do with fiscal management. Indirectly, reducing non-performing tenured veteran teachers is one of the goals of those championing 'teachers' assessment'. Education in the United States of America has turned to privatization; the growth of charter schools is welcomed by the general as a way of improving the current education system but some people sees the move as an attack against public education. In some countries like Japan and Singapore, teachers are the best paying jobs. However, in the US teachers' meager wages is not a secret and the push for more working hours is causing tension in the teaching sector.

The push for accountability in teaching and learning and the need for data collection to inform the ministry about the overall performance of teachers and students resulted in the move of embracing the nationwide Teacher Performance Assessment (TPA). Introduced as a more authentic assessment by looking at what is going on in the classroom and how teachers teach students, TPA carries the message that teachers should not be assessed based on students' performance exclusively. The move to introduce a standard assessment which looks at the teaching quality and practices of students teachers is welcomed by the majority of teachers colleges in the USA. Currently, TPA is being piloted in 20 states and in 2012-2013 states such as Massachusetts, Minnesota, New York, Washington and Tennessee will adopt TPA as a requirement for licensure.

The Teachers Performance Assessment (TPA) is heavily modelled after the California's Performance Assessment for California Teachers (PACT) (Pechone & Chung, 2006, p. 22). In the year 2008, the State of California endorsed SB2042 as way to allow flexibility in producing educators with teaching credentials through various pathways but a common standard should be adhered. This California state law requires the candidates for a preliminary Multiple and Single Subject Teaching Credential to pass an assessment of their teaching performance with K-12 public school students in obtaining a teaching credential. The PACT consortium began with the collaboration by 8 University of California institutions, San Diego State, San Jose State, Stanford, and Mills in 2001 to develop an alternative assessment. The major component of the assessment is known as the 'Teaching Event' (TE) and it was inspired by the portfolio assessments of the Connecticut State Department of Education,

INTASC (the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium) and the National Board. The nature of this hybrid testing which are both summative and formative assessment makes it appealing and a success in that state.

The Teaching Event (TE) is a port-folio based assessment that includes aspects of teaching which are deemed as vital in ensuring students learning which are Planning, Instruction, Assessment, and Reflection (PIAR scoring structure). These PACT assessments are identified as teaching events (TEs) and use the following sources of data:

- Teacher plans
- Teacher artifacts
- Student work samples
- Video clips of teaching
- Teacher reflections
- Teacher Commentaries

In addition, students are also expected to describe the context of their teaching. Students are expected to fulfil the list of requirements in the TE in order to get the teaching certificate. These aspects of learning work closely with the types of knowledge that teachers should have. These concepts are tie in with the features of highly qualified teachers as addressed by The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF, 1996, p. 73) which are: Knowledge of subject matter and how to make it accessible to students;

- Understanding of how to foster learning and development;
- Ability to create learning experiences adapted to the needs of diverse learners;
- Use of teaching strategies that foster critical thinking, problem solving and high levels of performance;
- Ability to create a positive, purposeful learning environment;
- Knowledge of how to foster effective communication and collaboration in the classroom;
- Ability to plan instruction based on subject matter, students, and curriculum goals, and the community context;
- Understanding and skilled use of a wide array of assessment strategies;
- Ability to reflect on, evaluate, and improve teaching and learning;
- Ability to collaborate with colleagues and parents to support student learning.

Stanford University researchers have taken the lead in promoting the California teacher assessment later spurned into a nationwide agenda. The piloting of the PACT model began in 2003 and it has received favourable comments. According to Arrends (2006), the PACT performance assessments have proved to be useful in providing a (an):

- Measure for teacher performance
- Improved evaluator of instructional practices (Mitchell et al., 2001; Porter et al., 2001)-
- Direct evaluation of teacher ability
- Measure for evaluating the quality of credentialing programs
- Fact-based system for state accountability
- Evidence-based measure for program accreditation and most importantly: "they can serve as powerful professional learning experiences" (Anderson & De Meulle, 1998; Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000; Lyons, 1998; Snyder, Lippincott, & Bower, 1998; Stone, 1998; Whitford, Ruscoe, & Fickel, 2000) (p. 2).

Following the rave reviews of the PACT program in California, in 2012 Stanford University has team up with Pearson in designing an assessment system where schools can turn to in helping them to evaluate student teachers should they face the problem of insufficient number of raters. However, students are responsible for the cost of the evaluation if their colleges are unable to provide instructors who could assess them. This is one of the problematic aspects of TPA which needs further attention. The Teachers Performance Assessment (TPA) basically focuses on the realistic standards that beginning teachers should know and able to do. TPA introduced to student teachers has the potential of promoting good practices in teaching by regulating standard procedures if it is made relevant to meet teachers' expectations and schools unique practices. TPA could also be adopted as one of the many possible tools to measure current teachers. In the US context, one of the many challenges is to convince the teachers that TPA their own best interest and it is not a personal attack on their abilities. More often than not, many teachers are somewhat apprehensive with the thought of an 'oppressive model' that only increases their workload and does not benefit them. In order to be accepted, TPA must ensure that their suggested practices benefit both students and teachers without taking away teachers freedom. TPA serves as a platform for teachers to learn, not only from their errors and mistakes but from one another. Although TPA is created for teachers from a different context, some criterion of TPA could be applied to the teachers in the developing countries. To start with, the goal of TPA is to improve teachers' instruction.

It also demands the characteristics of quality practices through the four tasks assigned. In order to discover how TPA could help teachers in developing countries, one should view TPA as a tool to improve the quality of teachers rather than a set of 'best practices'. Most importantly TPA should serve as a framework in finding the answers for quality teaching. It is an assessment tool that has a great potential in creating better teachers if it is designed to comply with the curriculum in the teaching colleges.

Teacher Assessment in Developing Countries

The developing world is striving to meet the goal of education for all by 2015. A lot of planning and monies have been allocated for various educational endeavors. Typically, teachers in developing countries have undergone a one to three years fully funded residence program. Since teacher training programs are very costly and there are a shortage of teachers, teachers' in developing countries do not face the risk of job termination because of poor performance. There are no threats to privatization. Teachers are government servants and most likely will be employed until retirement. However, the job stability does not automatically align with quality teaching. According to Perraton (2000) as cited in Odhiambo (2005), teachers in developing countries are poorly trained, poorly paid and are often ignored (p. 403). Besides that, the shortage of teachers has led to fast recruitments of untrained teachers. Due to the time constraint and limited recourses, teacher certification programs in the developing countries are often poorly designed and teachers are not expected to perform. This scenario makes the goal of achieving 'good education' very challenging. Regardless of the grass root problem teachers are assessed by officials from the ministry of education or the head of the schools.

Assessment works closely with teachers' classroom practices. In evaluating teachers, one would observe the set of practices to decide if the teachers' actions are good or bad and whether they met the expected standards. Assessment on teachers' performance is generally known as Teacher Appraisal. Traditionally, teachers are appraised as quality assurance. There are many ways to appraise teachers which include lesson observations, students evaluation of teachers and appraisals based on students' tests scores. In China, the teacher appraisal models after the country's collectivist ideology (Zhang & Ng, 2011, p. 572). Therefore, it values evaluation models that touch on collaboration between teachers and learning from one another in improving the quality of teaching and students performance.

Kenya's scenario is no different than most developing countries. In this country of 244, 947 primary and secondary school teachers, teacher observation is the main type of teacher appraisal (Odhiambo, 2005, p. 403). Some developing countries try to move from the strict appraisal system by establishing positions such as school supervisors as a way of monitoring and supporting teachers. However, in the district of Rawalpindi in Pakistan, teachers feel that the supervisors of the local primary schools do not do a job at assisting teachers (Behlol, Yousuf, Parveen, & Kayani, 2011, p. 28). In fact, they feel that these supervisors are very uncooperative and they are only visits schools to "threaten teachers" (p. 32).

Although there are a sizeable literature about teachers assessment and appraisals in developing countries, studies of required certification for student teachers are limited. This gives the wide assumption that the standard of passing the teacher education in developing countries are low and the teacher candidates are not required to proof their ability to carry out teaching duties. Some countries require student teachers to sit for a written examination which mostly touches on the subject content and theories as a requirement for graduation and certification. Thus, there is a disconnection between theory and practice and this affected the overarching goal of producing good teachers how know what they are supposed to teach their students and how they can make students learn effectively. It is also possible that the weak link between the practicum sessions and the theories makes teaching less effective. Therefore integrating some components of TPA into student teachers evaluation could be the first step in promoting the quality of teaching. Nonetheless, before this could be materialized it is important to understand how teachers learn and identify the relevance of the features of TPA into the context of the countries.

It is not too late to demand excellence from teachers. The best way is to look at the weaknesses of the current curriculum and advocate for changes. Curriculum should be organized in such way that it expects high performance from teacher candidates and it also pays attention to the constraints in achieving the goal. The introduction to a standardized teacher assessment is the first step in advocating for quality teaching. The standardized teaching assessment train teachers to challenges themselves and adhere to a high standard of evaluating teacher effectiveness. This standardized teaching assessment could also be expanded to in-service teachers in stages. This could be the answer to authentic assessment and it does not expect teachers to go out of their way in order to be a good teacher. Before

including a standardized assessment in teacher education programs, it is important to understand how teachers learn and make sure that the curriculum teaches the skills that would be assessed.

Understanding How Teachers Learn

The conceptual change in teacher education from teaching to learning has resulted to the strong emphasis on understanding how teachers learn and ways of bridging teachers learning and students learning. How teachers' learn and see their world place important consideration when assessing them. Through Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, among many findings Johnson & Golombek (2003) identifies 'cultural tools' that mediates learning: object-regulated, other-regulated and self – regulated. Through Vygotsky's 'theoretical lens' we are able to understand teacher education better (p. 730). Another important matter that influence teachers practice is their teaching ideology. According to Bartolome (2004), new teachers' ideology connects with their perceptions and practices in classrooms. Hence it is vital for teachers' education instructors to facilitate these conscious or subconscious ideas because of their relation with the learning outcomes. Some of the considerations which might affect how a teacher sees the classroom are the macro-level political, economic, and social variables and subordinated groups' academic performance in the micro-level classroom.

Teachers form their ideas from the training received in the teachers training institutions. However, the training is insufficient or not relevant to the classroom real practices. Most teacher training programs produce a mass number of graduates to meet the demands of the country and compromise of the quality. Even when the training reflects the practice in schools, due to reasons such as financial strain, bureaucracy and lack of understanding among senior school teachers and administrators prevent teachers from making the best decision for their students. Kincheloe (2004) shares the dilemma that many NYC teachers asks when being condemned by surplus of so called 'stakeholders' when today's education cannot satisfy the larger group; "Why learn this, they sometime asks me, "when the system doesn't let us apply it in our deskilled classroom?" (p. 3). The growth of immigrants from all parts of the world in the United States of America gave birth to the practice of Multicultural Education in the American classrooms. In embracing diversity and promoting educational equity, teachers are introduced to the design principles of good practice in multicultural education. Zeichner, et al (2010) have identified three main categories of design principles in multicultural education which are institutional and programmatic principles, personnel principles and curriculum and instruction principles (p. 163). Thus, teachers' assessment does not only concerns teachers' good practices in classroom but also teachers and schools connection with diversity in education. TPA is responds to the various needs of students and it stresses on many aspects of teaching such as recognizing language skills, acknowledging students' diverse learning skills and emphasizing on personal connections.

Developing a Teacher Assessment Model for Developing Countries

First of all, before any type of assessment models could be introduced to developing countries, it is important to study the existing assessment in the countries. The strengths and the weaknesses of the current system should be analyzed in making suggestions that mirrors TPA. TPA should not be seen as the ultimate model in teacher education. There is a possibility that some of the developing countries already have strong assessments that meet the demands within their context. Understanding the goals of TPA and recognizing the teaching philosophies of the countries are vital in gauging the potential of adopting or adapting TPA into the current system. Among many goals, TPA is designed "to give pre-service teachers the opportunity to develop, refine, and demonstrate their teaching knowledge, skills and abilities during their preparation program" (Teaching, 2010, p 1). The four tasks specifically tackle on subject-specific pedagogy, designing instruction, assessing learning, culminating teaching experience. In addition, TPA expects students to go beyond the traditional teaching practice with the aim that students will contextualize knowledge during the teaching practice.

Next, borrowing features of TPA into the practice of the teachers' education college affect the establishment of the current curriculum. The four main context of evaluation which are Planning, Instruction, Assessment and Reflection (PIAR) should be treated as equally balanced. However the substitution of the criterion or deletion is allowed depending on the context of teaching.

Third, a careful consideration is needed in adopting and adapting TPA depending on the needs and objectives of the curriculum. It is necessary to scrutinize the curriculum and make changes that relate to curriculum which are practical in the context of teaching and learning. For an example, in rural areas where technology is very limiting videotaping could be substitute with classroom observations.

In addition, the teacher performance assessment should give students the opportunity to reflect on their teaching and learning and create a dialogue with their colleagues and supervisor. These interactions are the crucial part of the social learning and student teachers should be encouraged to talk about issues and concerns in the standardized teacher assessment.

Finally the biggest change is to introduce a nationwide system that is applicable to all student teachers in the developing countries. Recognizing the diversity in context, resources and political stability within the different regions in each developing country, there is a need to make sure that if not all, some of the criterion of teachers performance assessment could be included in the training of the teachers.

Discussion and Conclusions

It is Teachers' practice and learning affects their performance. Before accessing teachers, it is important to give students the skills and the types of knowledge that they need to become a good teacher. The types of knowledge in teacher preparation (Kincheloe, 2004) which are Empirical, Experiential, Normative, Critical, Ontological, and Reflective-Synthetic Domain must be included in the curriculum and should be reflected in the assessment rubrics (p. 52).

In teachers' education it is important to understand that these values must be inculcated during pre-service education. The introduction of TPA to student teachers is an intelligent move in producing a future generation of teachers who are hold up to a strong standard. Since teachers' performances is believed to affect students' achievement, more research and investments in teacher education could be the answer to excellent education.

Incorporating the features of United States TPA to context of student teachers assessment in developing countries could be a solution in raising the bar for teachers in developing countries. The first step in evaluating teachers is to identify what 'good teaching' is and design an assessment that relates to the country's contexts and goals. It should be made clear that 'good teaching' works closely with the types of knowledge exposed to teacher candidates. This requires a heavy re-evaluation of the current curriculum in developing a system that demands excellence teaching skills from teachers.

Given the design of TPA, it is important to understand that it is not a tool for measuring teachers accountability on students achievements instead sees it as the first step in establishing 'good teaching'. In short, TPA should be introduced as the tool in promoting 'good teaching' and professional developments (PD) could be included after graduation.

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